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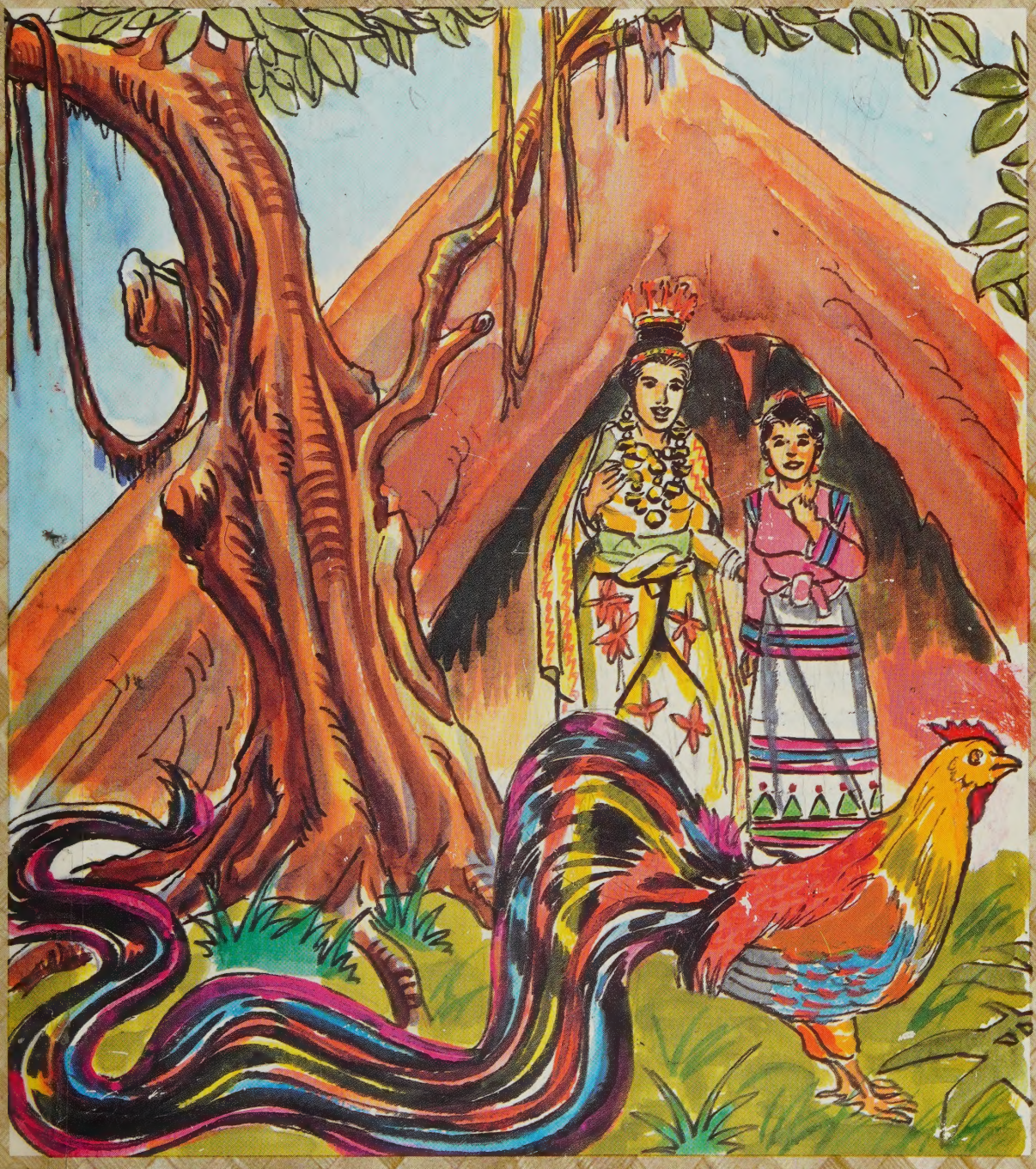
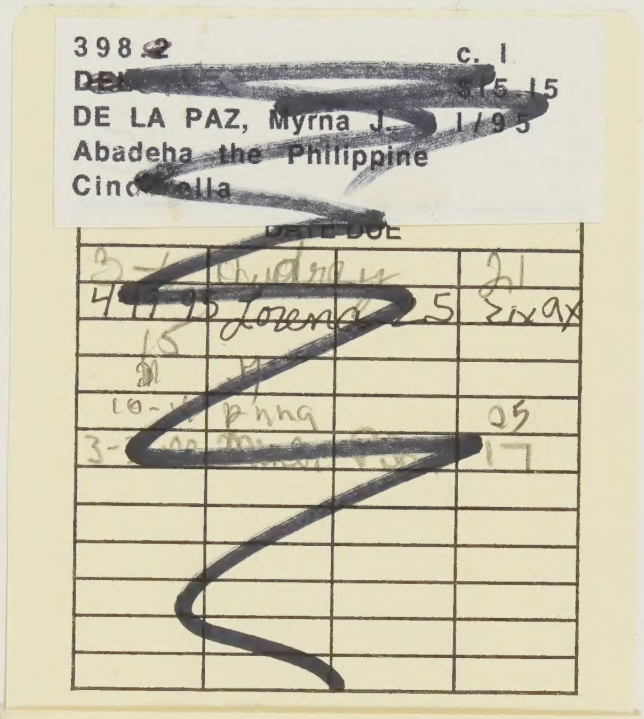
Abadeha
THE PHILIPPINE CINDERELLA

by Myrna J. de la Paz

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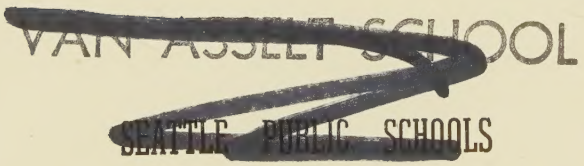
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For my Tessa
M.J.P.

PAZIFIC QUEEN COMMUNICATIONS
LOS ANGELES • CALIFORNIA

Abadeha

THE PHILIPPINE CINDERELLA

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Summary: Through her enduring faith in the souls of her ancestors and the benevolence of the spirits of nature, Abadeha, the Philippine Cinderella, prevails against her enslavement by the scheming usurpers in her father's house and eventually becomes the bride of the prince.

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Once upon a time, in one of the sunny islands of the Philippines, there lived a man named Abak and his wife Abadesa. They had a beautiful little daughter whom they loved very much and they called her Abadeha.

When Abadeha turned thirteen years old, her loving mother, Abadesa, became very ill and within a few weeks, died. She was buried in the cool shade of a nearby forest.

The following year, on a trip to another island, Abak met a widow who had three daughters. He married her and brought all of them back home with him. The moment the stepmother saw Abadeha, she became envious of her beauty. Her three daughters looked plain compared to Abadeha.

"I will make life miserable for you, Abadeha," the stepmother secretly swore to herself. Abak did not know that his second wife was very envious of his daughter.

Soon after, the stepmother started treating Abadeha like a servant. She made Abadeha do all the housework and many other chores besides. All day long and up to the night, Abadeha had to clean the house, wash the dirty laundry, fetch water from the river and cook all the meals. Then late at night, when Abadeha was very tired, the stepmother made Abadeha sleep on the kitchen floor alone.

Meanwhile, Abadeha's stepsisters did nothing but try hard to make themselves look pretty. On the other hand, Abadeha always looked dirty with sweat and soot from the kitchen stove.

"But why do you ever love to powder your face with soot, Kitchen Princess?" Her stepsisters would mock Abadeha and laugh at her.

Whenever Abadeha was too tired to work and wanted to rest, her stepmother would grab the broom and strike her with it.

"You good for nothing lazy girl, next time I will whip you with the tail of a stingray to make you move." The stepmother would scream at the top of her voice.

Day after day, when Abak went away on his fishing trips, the stepmother became more cruel and unreasonable. One morning, while Abadeha was scouring the clay pots in the kitchen, her stepmother threw two handkerchiefs at Abadeha's face.

"Go to the river and wash these two handkerchiefs until the white one turns black and the black one turns white. Do exactly as I tell you or else, I shall whip you until your bones break." The stepmother threatened.

Abadeha took the two handkerchiefs and sadly walked along the river bank until she found herself sitting under the shade of a bamboo tree. As Abadeha watched the clear waters flowing down the river, she remembered how life was so happy when her mother was alive. Alone in the defeaning silence, her tears began to fall. Then she heard her own voice cry,

"Oh Bathala, God of the Earth!
Oh Anitos, spirits of my ancestors!
Hear me, please!
Oh dear mother!
Help me, please help me!
I have become a slave in my father's house."

A moment later, Abadeha felt a gentle wind and then the rustling of leaves in the forest by the river. When she turned around, she saw a beautiful, radiant lady looking tenderly at her.

The lady took a step nearer and then began to speak, "I have come because I have heard your cries for help. Take comfort, because one day your patience and hard work will surely be rewarded."

"But who are you if I may be permitted to ask," Abadeha cried out in surprise.

"I am the Spirit of the forest and I watch faithfully over this place," the lady replied. Gently, she took the two handkerchiefs from Abadeha's hand and waved them with one flick in the air.

Suddenly out of nowhere a young man and a young woman appeared and bowed respectfully before the Spirit of the forest. Each taking a handkerchief from her, they began to move together in a magical dance in the water.

When the dance was over, they returned the handkerchiefs to Abadeha who was pleasantly astonished because the black handkerchief had turned white and the white handkerchief had turned black.

Abadeha hurried home and gave the handkerchiefs to her stepmother who became very furious.

"So our Kitchen Princess was able to do this," the stepmother snorted. For the first time the stepmother lost a chance to make Abadeha suffer.

Determined to make Abadeha fail, the next morning, the stepmother first commanded her to spread newly harvested rice on a mat to dry in the sun. Then she told Abadeha to go to the granary to pound rice and winnow to separate the husk from the grain. Finally, she told Abadeha to go to the kitchen and cook the rice in a clay pot.

While Abadeha was upstairs cooking rice, a pig came to the yard and tore the mat into tatters while gobbling the rice that was drying in the sun.

When the stepmother saw what was happening, she triumphantly called Abadeha.

"You see what that pig did to the rice and the mat!" The stepmother yelled.

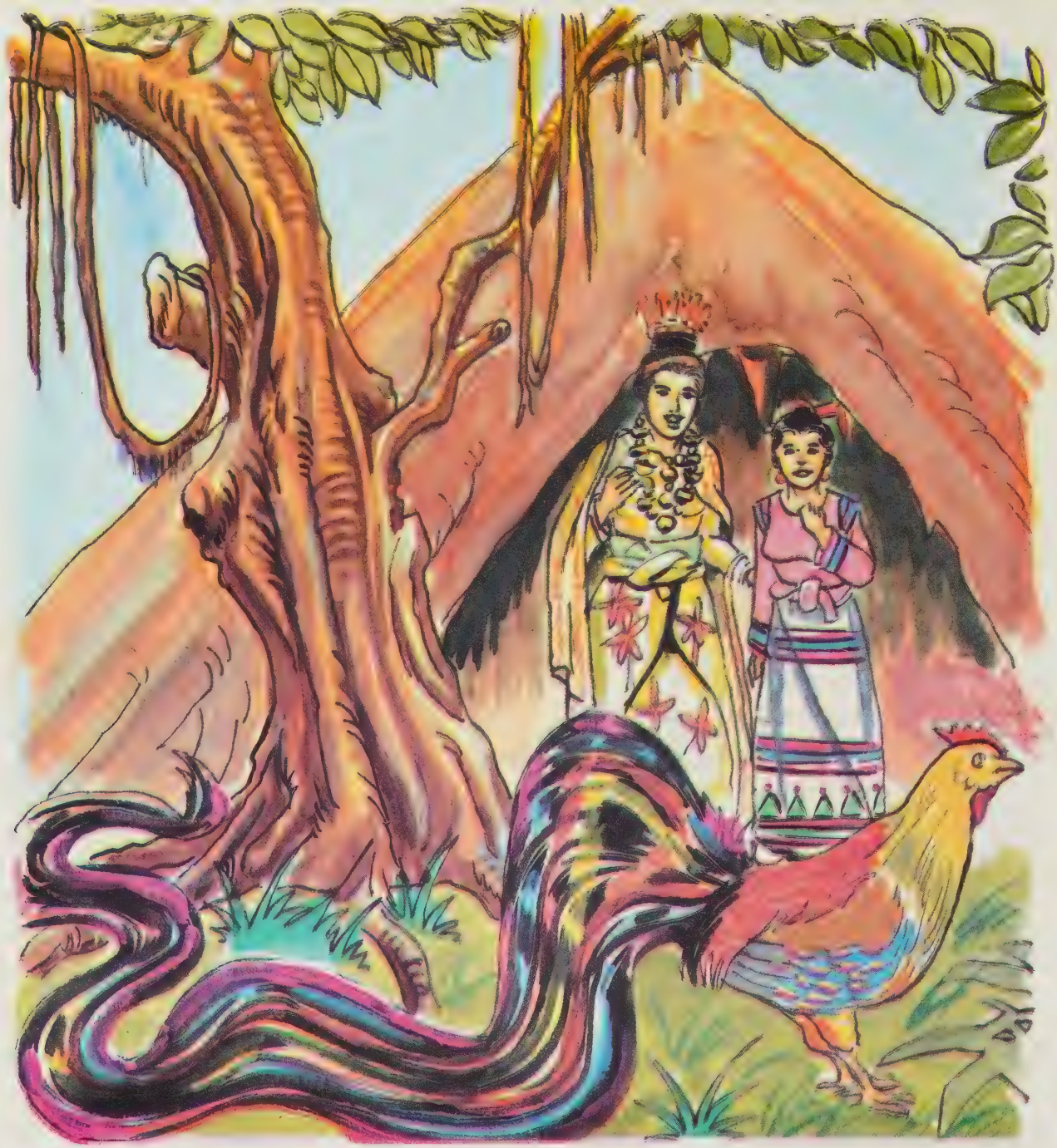
"But ma'am I was busy cooking the rice," Abadeha answered.

"Don't give me any excuses, careless girl!" The stepmother screamed while pulling Abadeha's hair. The poor girl cried and pleaded with her stepmother to stop.

"Alright, this time you must weave the tattered mat into one piece again," the stepmother hissed.

Carrying the tattered mat, Abadeha cried all the way to the river bank where the beautiful lady again appeared to her. Abadeha showed the tattered mat to the lady and said between sobs, "My stepmother wants me to make the mat whole again."

This time the Spirit of the forest lightly clapped her hands three times and in the wink of an eye a group of girls appeared from nowhere and skillfully started to weave the mat together. In just a few moments the mat was entirely new again to Abadeha's delight.



Then the Spirit of the forest invited Abadeha to her home in an enchanted cave under a huge tree deep in the forest. There she showed Abadeha a hen with feathers with the colors of the rainbow and a long flowing tail.

"I have never seen such a beautiful chicken," Abadeha said in awe.

"Then you can have her for a pet," said the lady with a smile.

"Oh thank you so much, I'm really grateful for all your help and kindness," Abadeha told the lady. Then she took the chicken in her arms and happily went home.

This time the stepmother was really annoyed when Abadeha showed her the fully restored mat. "If I ever find out how you are cheating me, you will really be in deep trouble," the stepmother said. "And where did you get that chicken?" The stepmother shouted glaring at her.

"I found it near the river," Abadeha said very softly.

"Hmmph...a wild chicken!" The stepmother said maliciously while grabbing the chicken from Abadeha.

"But this is my pet," pleaded Abadeha.

"Then let me take care of this beautiful bird," she added with a twisted smile upon her lips.

Early the next day, while Abadeha was sweeping the yard, the stepmother took the chicken from the coop and chopped its head off with a knife.

When Abadeha went up the house, the stepmother was gleefully roasting the chicken on the stove.

Abadeha could not believe what she saw. But when she looked inside the coop she found only the chicken's feet.

The stepmother smiled with raised eyebrows and said, "This chicken is big and fat. We will have a delicious dinner tonight."

Abadeha could only weep. Then she took the chicken's feet with her and ran to the river.

When Abadeha reached the river, the Spirit of the forest was there to meet her. Weeping, Abadeha showed the lady the chicken's feet. "If my stepmother could do this to my pet, she can do the same to me," Abadeha cried.

"Do not be afraid, my child. Go and plant those chicken feet on your mother's grave and pray to your ancestors," the lady tenderly told Abadeha.

Abadeha obediently went to her mother's grave where she buried the chicken's feet and planted a little garden. Then she wept and sang in prayer.

"Life is not
What it was before
You left dear Mother
The days are longer
The work is harder
My tears are flowing
Like the river
But when I touch you
In my heart
Always, I feel stronger."

As if in answer to her prayers, the rain fell from the heavens and washed away Abadeha's tears.

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The rainy season had passed before Abadeha went back to her garden. She was amazed to see that the chicken feet that she planted had grown into an enchanted tree flowering with all sorts of treasures such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, pearls, diamonds and golden dresses. Abadeha knelt down and thanked Bathala and the spirits of her ancestors. Then she took a beautiful golden gown and some jewelry from the tree. Abadeha was very happy about the wonderful tree, but she decided to keep it a secret.

Upon reaching home, Abadeha hid the golden gown and the jewelry in an old trunk in the granary. When she went inside the house, her stepmother was waiting for her.

"Where have you been Abadeha?" The stepmother asked sharply.

"I took a walk in the coconut grove." Abadeha answered calmly.

"You are just trying to get away from work," the stepmother said while grabbing a bundle from the floor. "Mend this blanket right now!" She screamed at Abadeha and then threw the bundle at her face.

One day, while hunting for pigs in the forest, the son of the chieftain in the island saw a chicken of many beautiful colors. He followed it and came upon Abadeha's secret garden. The prince could not believe his eyes when he saw the treasure-bearing tree. He immediately knew that it was an enchanted tree so he took some tobacco leaves and betel nuts from his bag and respectfully laid them below the trunk. Then the young man knelt on the ground, bowed his head and said, "Bathala and Spirit of the forest, forgive me for stepping on your sacred ground and standing close to this wonderful tree. Please accept my humble offering and allow me to pick one of your precious gifts." Then the prince picked a ring from a branch and slipped it on his finger.

At home that evening, the young man's finger started to swell. He called his father and said, "Father, my finger hurts terribly but I can not remove the ring."

"I will call the healer right now." The father said.

The healer came and performed a ceremony but failed to remove the ring from the young man's finger. All he could say to the prince was, "Listen to your heart, perhaps it will tell you what to do."

As the night wore on, the pain in the young man's finger became unbearable. He was delirious. In a fevered dream, a chicken with beautiful colored feathers came to him offering an orchid flower in its beak. The young man took the flower and kissed it. Suddenly the flower turned into a beautiful young maiden. Then she opened her palm and showed him a ring. The young man looked at his hand and saw that the ring was no longer on his finger.

The prince woke up with a start and told his father about his dream. The father immediately sent for the crier of the island and told him, "Go beat your drum and tell everyone that the girl who can remove the ring from my son's finger will become his bride."

The crier wasted no time in doing his task. By midday he had announced the news to the whole island. All the unmarried girls flocked to see the prince but none of them could remove the ring from his finger.

When Abadeha heard the news, she asked permission to go to the palace but instead the stepmother locked her in the kitchen. "You do not deserve to see the young gentleman," she told Abadeha. "Your place is in my kitchen." Then the stepmother sat on a hammock but she soon fell asleep. In a short while, the Spirit of the forest appeared and unlocked the kitchen door.

She smiled at Abadeha and said. "The young man is waiting for you. Go and see him now."

When Abadeha arrived at the palace, her stepsisters glowered at her. They started to push and drag her away.

"How dare you come here!"

"Look at yourself. You're so filthy!"

"Get out of here!" The stepsisters shouted at Abadeha.

The prince noticed the commotion and said, "why are you doing that to her. Please, allow her to come near."

All the people looked in disbelief as Abadeha in her ragged clothes approached the young man. She calmly took the prince's hand and very easily removed the ring from his swollen finger. The young man was overjoyed. He tenderly kissed Abadeha's hands and held them close to his heart. "You are really the most beautiful girl in the world and now I have found you," he told Abadeha.

The whole island rejoiced with Abadeha and her groom at their wedding the following day. All the best dancers, singers, musicians, poets and magicians came to the wedding which was the biggest and the merriest the islanders had ever seen. Abadeha wore the golden gown and the jewelry from the enchanted tree in her secret garden. She looked as beautiful as a princess while her stepsisters who sat beside her looked like kitchen maids. The Spirit of the forest was her very special guest but only Abadeha could see her. That day was the beginning of a long and happy life for Abadeha and her prince.

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